

Breastfeeding Is Essential For Promoting Good Health For Mothers and Babies

Breastfeeding is one of the most important steps new mothers can take to ensure their babies get the best possible start in life. In fact, breastfeeding is so essential in promoting babies' well-being that the American Academy of Pediatrics urges that all mothers breastfeed, for the first year of life, and longer if desired, except in the few cases where a mother is advised by her physician not to breastfeed.

Research indicates that breastmilk is the ideal food to nourish newborns because it provides all the nutrients that babies need for about the first six months of their life. Additional foods may be introduced into baby's diet after the first six months of age.

Since breastmilk provides babies with their mothers' immunity to disease, it also can help to guard against many illnesses and allergies. Research shows that breastfeeding reduces the likelihood of respiratory infections, allergies, asthma and some childhood cancers such as lymphoma. There is strong evidence that breastmilk also protects against gastrointestinal diseases, diabetes, urinary tract infections, and chronic ear infections. Even the risk of SIDS, or sudden infant death syndrome, may be reduced when babies are breastfed. In some studies, babies that are breastfed have scored higher on intelligence tests than babies that are formula fed.

Breastfeeding is not only good for new babies, but for new mothers as well. Breastfeeding may reduce the risk of breast and ovarian cancer, may help speed up postpartum weight loss, and

may delay the return of menstrual periods. Breastfeeding also causes a woman's uterus to return to its normal size more quickly, making recovery from childbirth easier.

A mother should start to nurse as soon as her baby is born. Doing so enables her to establish close physical contact with her child early on, which will help to build a secure, loving relationship. Babies who are breastfed enjoy being close to their mothers throughout the day. A mother's warmth and presence provides babies with a continual sense of security.

Over the past few years, there has been a tremendous amount of new research about the many long- and short-term benefits to breastfeeding. One of the most important things for mothers to remember is that breastfeeding is extremely important to the physical, mental and emotional health of their children. Breastfeeding is the very best thing that any mother can do for herself and her baby.

Local clinics, county agencies or community-based organizations are excellent resources for mothers that have questions about breastfeeding. For additional breastfeeding information, mothers may also call La Leche League at 1-800-La Leche or (1-800-525-3243) or contact your local WIC office.

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